DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 050 676 HE 002 149

AUTHOR	Rosner, Benjamin
TITLE	Open Admissions at The City University of New York.
INSTITUTION	American Association for the Advancement of Science, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	27 Dec 70
NOTE	13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Chicago, Illinois, December 27, 1970
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Admission (School), College Freshmen, *Compensatory Education Programs, *Disadvantaged Youth, Educationally Disadvantaged, *Higher Education, *Open Admissions, Special Programs, Special Services, Universal Education
IDENTIFIERS	*City University of New York

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the history of the open admissions policy at The City University of New York (CUNY). Discussed are: (1) the founding of the University and its early admission policies; (2) the demand for and implementation of the open admission policy, which means a probable freshman class of 36,000 in the fall of 1971, with an increase of 16,000 in 1 year; (3) budgetary considerations; (4) the political and social context within which the open admissions policy was formulated; (5) the demand for and provision of remedial and other supportive services for an estimated 10,000 students; (6) the studies conducted to estimate the number of students who would require remedial help; (7) the systematic evaluation of the open admissions program; (8) the need to establish a closer relationship with the public schools to place the problem of remediation where it belongs; and (9) the necessity of maintaining CUNY's academic standards. (AF)

ED050676

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

OPEN ADMISSIONS AT THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK*

Benjamin Rosner
The City University of New York

In September, 1970, The City University of New York (CUNY) enrolled 34,500 freshmen in its nine senior and seven community colleges. These freshmen represented an increment of approximately 16,000 students - or a little more than 80 per cent - over the number of freshmen enrolled in the fall of 1969. The story of this "vnd" - this "very noticeable difference" - is the story of the Open Admissions Program at The City University. It is, perhaps, the story of the boldest experiment in higher education in the twentieth century.

The story has many beginnings. It begins, in part, in 1847 when The City College was established by vote of the people of the City of New York to offer free higher educational opportunity to the city's youth. Since that time criteria for admission to the colleges of The City University have been governed by budgetary limitations, with qualifications determined on the basis of the funds available to provide space for incoming students. It begins again in 1964 when the trustees of The City University - The Board of Higher Education - responding to the demand by industry and government for employees with post secondary education, established a goal of guaranteeing admission to all New York City high school graduates by 1975. Most recently, it begins in 1969 when the Board of Higher Education, responding to the demand of the City's minority groups for equal higher educational opportunity for all of the City's youth, accelerated its open admissions target date to September, 1970. Today, open admissions at The City University means that every graduate of a New York City high school as of June 1970 and thereafter, is eligible for admission to a college of The City University. In

*A paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for The Advancement of Science, Chicago, December 27, 1970.

HE002 149

12

September, 1971, CUNY anticipates a freshman class of 36,000 students.

Although the magnitude of CUNY's open admissions program tends to generate experimental variables sufficient unto themselves, the problems of scale do not alone fully convey the sense of the open admissions experiment. To be sure an increment of 16,000 freshmen in a single year demands a rather imaginative approach to the acquisition of necessary budget, personnel and physical facilities - acquisitions not easily come by but obviously critical to the establishment of the program. Moreover, given today's tight money situation and given the problems of developing space in New York City, it is nothing short of miraculous that CUNY was able to generate tax-levy support almost equal to the need, and to construct and/or rent one million square feet of additional space to accommodate its increased enrollment. Despite these efforts, however, money and space still remain major obstacles to the full implementation of the program, with space more than money the greater need. As a matter of fact, Albert Bowker, Chancellor of The City University, has described the space problem as "nearly catastrophic," requiring CUNY to rent and prepare an additional one million square feet of space for the coming academic year, 1971-72. The threat to the survival of the University is not the pressure from without, but the pressure from within. At the City University, we pray for good weather and encourage the exploration of outer space.

A moment ago, I noted that City and State tax-levy support was almost equal to the need. Obviously, budgetary support is never equal to need - "or what's a heaven for" - but in this instance both the City and the State made genuine efforts to accommodate CUNY's open admissions budget request. I might digress for a moment to report on an interesting bit of higher education institutional research.

When the Board of Higher Education adopted its open admissions policy, CUNY began to develop a number of models to estimate its 1970 freshman enrollment.

With a potential freshman class of 75,000 New York City high school graduates, it was rather important to determine whether the increment in freshmen enrollment would be of the order of 15,000 or 50,000. Based upon its models, CUNY generated an estimate of 35,000 incoming freshmen and its 1970-71 budget request took that estimate into account. Curiously, when the City's budget office applied the models to the same data they generated an estimate of 32,500 freshmen, and later, when the State's budget office applied the models to these same data they calculated an estimate of 30,000 students. Obviously, CUNY's models had not fully recognized the import of moderator variables in regression analysis.

Earlier I indicated that the full sense of the open admissions experiment could not be appreciated by attending to the magnitude of the enterprise alone. In order to truly comprehend the experimental nature of the program, it is essential to understand the political and social context within which the open admissions policy was formulated.

In the spring of 1969, students at The City College began demonstrating for acceptance of five demands, one of which was increased enrollment of disadvantaged black and Puerto Rican students. During negotiations with the faculty, a dual admissions system was proposed, under which half of the 1970 entering class at the college would be admitted using the existing criteria of high school average and test score, and the other half of the class would be selected from graduates of public high schools which consistently produced a small number of students with academic diplomas but which had large proportions of black and Puerto Rican students. For the 1969 entering class, for which acceptances had already been issued, the college was asked to admit 300 additional freshmen, recruited from high schools in Manhattan and the Bronx, which traditionally produce few academic diplomas.

A faculty negotiating team accepted the proposed dual admissions system, but neither the college's tenured faculty nor the Board of Higher Education found

such a system acceptable. The Board began a series of public hearings to determine the views of students, faculty, alumni, and community representatives. Then, at a special meeting on July 9, 1969, the Board issued a statement reaffirming its commitment to an open admissions policy and directed the Chancellor of the University to determine the feasibility of putting the open admissions plan into effect in September, 1970 rather than September, 1975. The Board also charged the University Commission on Admissions to "review and make recommendations concerning the admissions system of the University" and to "recommend a specific system of admissions criteria which would insure that each unit of the University was given significant responsibilities for preparing the academically less prepared student to engage in collegiate study."

The guidelines set for the open admissions plan were:

a. it shall offer admission to some University program to all high school graduates of the city.

b. it shall provide for remedial and other supportive services for all students requiring them.

c. it shall maintain and enhance the standards of academic excellence of the colleges of the University.

d. it shall result in the ethnic integration of the colleges.

e. it shall provide for mobility of students between various programs and units of the University.

f. it shall assure that students who have been admitted to specific community or senior colleges under prior admissions criteria shall still be so admitted.

On October, 7, 1969, the Commission on Admissions submitted its report to the Board of Higher Education. The "major mandate" given the Commission had been the responsibility to recommend a system of allocating the students to various programs of the University. The Commission recommended a plan based on

the student's class rank, rather than on grade average as in the past. This, according to the Commission, would prevent the concentration of black and Puerto Rican students in the community or two-year colleges.

Following the issuance of the report, the Board held public hearings on its contents. On November 12, 1969, the Board reaffirmed its policy to offer admission to all New York City high school students graduated in June, 1970 and thereafter to some college of the University effective September, 1970. The Board's reaffirmation statement included the exposition of a plan of placement which combined the old grade average plan with the rank in class system proposed by the Commission on Admissions. Specifically, CUNY's admission (placement) policies now assure all high school graduates with grade point averages of 80 or better, or all graduates in the top half of their graduating class, with a place in one of the senior colleges of The City University. In addition, all graduates with averages below 80 or in the bottom half of their class are offered admission to a community college. Moreover, the University has attempted to offer the student the senior or community college of his choice. In this regard, it should be noted that 88 per cent of the 1970 freshman class received the college of first choice. Finally, CUNY has expanded its SEEK programs so that students meeting certain poverty criteria are admitted to senior colleges regardless of their grade point averages or their rank in class. In this manner CUNY's admissions procedures have implemented the Board's guidelines to offer admission to a college of the University to all New York City high school graduates, to assure that students admitted to specific colleges under prior admissions criteria would still be so admitted, and to achieve an ethnic integration of the colleges. Let me note here that approximately one-fourth of all CUNY freshmen are blacks or Puerto Ricans - a percentage that equals the proportion of blacks and Puerto Ricans graduating from New York City high schools.

Among the persistent questions directed against CUNY's open admissions policy is whether it is not, in fact, a revolving door policy. Open admissions is, after all, not a CUNY-invented concept. A number of state universities have, in the past, admitted most, if not all, of a state's high school graduates into their freshman classes. Typically, however, students so admitted have had to sink or swim as they could with little or no effort made to assure their survivals. It was not unusual, therefore, to observe large drop-out rates during or after the freshman year. A 50 per cent drop-out rate after the freshman year was almost anticipated. It was to guard against such occurrences that the Board of Higher Education insisted that CUNY "provide for remedial and other supportive services for all students requiring them."

To implement this directive, the University undertook a study to estimate the numbers of students requiring remedial instruction. In addition, it examined its experience with SEEK and College Discovery students to estimate its need for additional counselors, and it conducted investigations of the amount of financial aid required to support large numbers of needy students. Because I shall describe in somewhat greater detail the studies designed to estimate the need for remediation, let me briefly note here that the $35 million appropriated this year for the open admissions program reflected a student-counselor ratio for "open admissions students" of 50:1, but it did not include special funds for student financial aid. Accordingly, assistance for students in financial need is limited. Some students receive financial aid by entering the University through such special admissions programs as SEEK, College Discovery, and the Educational Opportunity Program. Others rely on loans, grants, and/or work-study programs. There is no question but that we need to do better in this regard.

Let me return at this point to a description of the studies conducted to estimate the number of students who would require remedial help. In describing

these studies I have drawn heavily upon a report prepared by Professor Patricia Kay, one of the staff in the Division of Teacher Education.

The major strategy for identifying students who needed and/or could profit from remedial assistance in reading, mathematics and English composition was the administration of reading and mathematics achievement tests to all incoming freshmen in the spring of 1970. As a result of a pilot study conducted some months earlier by Professor Max Weiner and others in the Division of Teacher Education, a junior high school level arithmetic computation test and a senior high school level reading test were administered on May 1, 1970 to 31,635 incoming freshmen at high school locations throughout the City. In addition, the test answer sheet asked each student to indicate whether or not he felt that he needed remedial assistance in reading, mathematics and composition. Students' self-reports were included in the Open Admissions Testing Program because the earlier pilot project indicated that students' perceptions of their need for remediation was related to their test performance, and the extra information might assist counselors in deciding whether to recommend one kind of remediation or another. Incidentally, approximately 6,500 students felt they needed help in mathematics and a similar number felt they required assistance in English composition.

Turning to the analysis of the reading test results, it appeared that no matter what comparisons were made, the number of incoming freshmen requiring some remedial instruction in reading was greater than had been anticipated. Assuming a ninth-grade reading ability score as necessary for successful performance in college level courses, it was found that almost 7,000 incoming freshmen scored below the average ninth-grade reading score, with approximately 1,500 scoring in the bottom fifth of the ninth-grade score distribution. Thirty-five per cent, or 12,000 entering freshmen, scored below the average score for 9th-grade college preparatory students. It was recommended, consequently, that any incoming freshman who scored below the 30th percentile of 9th-grade students in

the national sample would, in all likelihood, be in need of intensive remediation in reading. Ten per cent, or approximately 3,200 incoming freshmen, were estimated to be in such dire need. It was also recommended that careful consideration for remediation in reading be given to students whose scores fell below the median CUNY score; a score corresponding to the twenty-fifth percentile of a national sample of 12th-grade college preparatory students. Clearly, large numbers of incoming freshmen required remediation in reading.

As dramatic as the reading results were, the mathematics results were even more dramatic. Twenty-five per cent, or about 8,000 students, scored below beginning eighth-grade levels in mathematics. Five thousand scored below the average beginning score at the seventh-grade level, and 2,000 scored at the end of fifth-grade level, or below. It was recommended that students whose scores fell below the 25th percentile of the 9th-grade national norms be given intensive remediation in mathematics, if they were expected to take any mathematics on a college level. As indicated above, approximately 8,000 students fell below this point.

For several reasons, no writing samples or other more objective measures of English composition skill were obtained. The decision not to include a measure of written English expression was based in large part upon the high correlation between reading and composition scores. In addition, counselors had access to students' high school records. It is unlikely that students in need of remediation in English composition went unnoticed.

Overall, as many as one-half of the incoming freshmen, mostly at the community colleges, were estimated to be in need of <u>some</u> remedial help. A more conservative planning estimate was approximately one-third. In general, then, CUNY had to prepare itself to offer remedial instruction in reading, mathematics and composition to approximately 10,000 students, with many requiring remediation

in all three academic areas. As a consequence, CUNY's 1970-71 budget included a substantial sum for the hiring of remediation specialists. The 1971-72 budg request, moreover, includes $22 million for the recruitment of additional coun selors, and remediation specialists in reading and mathematics. In sum, it ca be unequivocally stated that CUNY's open admission policy is not a revolving d policy. The University has systematically studied its need to provide for rem dial, counseling and financial aid to all students who require such assistance and it has allocated funds, in amounts unprecedented in higher education, for such supportive services.

How successful will the effort be? It is, frankly, much too soon to te But the University is as much concerned with the answer to this question as an one. As a matter of fact, the University regards its current experience with open admissions of such potential interest and value to higher education acro the country, that it has taken the matter of evaluating this and every other aspect of the open admissions program very seriously. As many of you know, CU has engaged the services of Alexander Astin and the American Council on Educat for the systematic evaluation of the open admissions program on its many campu and such evaluation is presently underway. Within the next year or so perhaps partial answers to questions of effectiveness will be forthcoming.

Before leaving the matter of remedial instruction for the business of academic standards, one or two pertinent observations must be made. First a c fession. Not even in its wildest moments does the University believe that it be able to translate every admitted freshman into a graduating senior. In our truly euphoric moments some of us dream about a 50 per cent success rate. In our more sober moments we hope for 25 per cent. And there are days when 10 to 20 per cent looks very good.

Is it worth it? Would the graduation of as few as 20 per cent of the "open admissions student" population be worth the cost? Do we dare to ask suc

questions? Unfortunately, we must. The cost of remedial instruction at the University level is from two to four times as great as the cost of remedial instruction at the elementary and secondary school levels, depending upon what factors enter into a determination of remedial costs for students in higher education. Realistically, we cannot expect public funds to continue to provide remedial and other supportive services for students in higher education without looking searchingly at cost-effectiveness ratios. The message for us at CUNY is clear. The University must establish closer working relationships with the public schools in order to attack the problem of remediation where it belongs - at the level of the elementary and secondary school.

In a real sense, the open admissions program has eliminated the artificial discontinuity between grades 12 and 13, creating, thereby, within the City of New York, an opportunity for the joint planning and delivery of instructional services to children and youth between the ages of 3 and 20 or 22, perhaps beyond.

This partnership in education will develop slowly, but it is developing. The thousands of students and hundreds of faculty members in the University's teacher education programs are spending larger and larger amounts of time in the schools. And not only for the improved preparation of the City's future teachers but also for the active contribution of the University's students and faculty to school's ongoing instructional program. Moreover, the University's participation in school affairs is not restricted to the faculty and students in teacher education. In 1968, in recognition of the need to develop stronger linkages between the schools and the University, the Board of Higher Education and the Board of Education for the City's public schools, established a Liaison Committee to study and make recommendations regarding problems of articulation between the school and the university systems. This Liaison Committee includes, in addition to myself, the Dean of Admissions, the Dean of Community College Affairs, the Executive Assistant to the Chancellor, and one of our college presidents. On the Board of

Education side, the Committee includes the Deputy Superintendent for Personnel, The Assistant Superintendent for High Schools, and the Director of Guidance. Among the Committee's more notable efforts, has been the creation of 11 inter-agency curriculum committees to review and make recommendations concerning needed revision in school and college curricula. These committees reflect the subject-matter organization of the high school curriculum and their membership includes CUNY faculty in education and in the arts and sciences, and Board of Education curriculum supervisors, department chairmen, and teachers. In addition, efforts are presently underway to add school and college students to these committees. To date, the committees have been exchanging information about school and college curricula, instructional materials and examinations and have been preparing proposals for planning grants to provide the funds for in depth study of curriculum articulation between the schools and the university. It is fully expected that the efforts of these committees will not only improve high school curricula but will also improve college curricula, particularly in the area of secondary school teacher education. It is also expected that the joint planning of these committees will sensitize both educational systems to their common objective of educating the city's youth.

I have touched briefly on the University's relationship with the schools, because it is clear that the University cannot long remain in the business of secondary education and survive. On the other hand, we cannot survive if open admissions becomes translated into a revolving door. We must, consequently, provide for the most effective remedial or compensatory instructional programs in higher education as we can, and at once, so engage ourselves in the business of the schools, that our will and our talent may serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of secondary education in the schools themselves.

Among the guidelines for CUNY's open admissions program is the directive

that the University "shall maintain and enhance the standards of academic excellence...." I suspect that no issue has generated more discussion both within and outside the University than this issue of academic standards. Frequently, the question put to CUNY faculty and administation is whether or not the open admissions program will depreciate the quality of a CUNY degree. This is a difficult question to answer. It is difficult because it usually assumes that the course of study leading to a degree in the arts, in the sciences and in the professions will be exactly the same in the future as it is today. In my judgment this assumption is unrealistic. Programs of study will change. At the doctoral level, for example, Fortran and Cobal are acceptable substitutes for French and Spanish just as French and Spanish were acceptable alternatives to Latin and Greek. At the undergraduate level, urban studies and Black and Hispanic studies are competing with the study of classical civilizations. Is the quality of the degree cheapened because programs of study are reflecting the needs of our students and contemporary society?

A second assumption underlying the question is that degrees are awarded on the basis of admissions requirements rather than graduation requirements. Let me say that CUNY has never awarded a degree on the basis of its admissions program. CUNY degrees are awarded on the basis of student performance in college level courses and programs as determined by CUNY's faculty. Moreover, CUNY's faculty is a zealous guardian of its tradition of academic excellence. It is unlikely, therefore, that CUNY's faculty will so dilute the character of its instructional program as to depreciate the quality of its degree.

Finally, CUNY recognizes that a cheapened degree serves neither in the interest of The City University nor in the public interest generally. It is quite clear that the erosion of academic standards will deprive the University of its ablest faculty and its ablest students and, ultimately, deny to the taxpaying public the quality educational service its dollars were expected to

provide. The University can ill afford to compromise on the integrity of its academic program. Neither the students, nor the faculty, nor the administration, nor the Board, nor the public at large will tolerate depreciation of the University's degree.

In presenting this description of CUNY's open admissions program I have suggested that it is, perhaps, the boldest experiment in higher education in the twentieth century. Let me conclude by qualifying the nature of the experiment. Open admissions is unidirectional. That is, at no point will the University be able to revert to its earlier practice of selective admissions. What is experimental is the manner in which the University responds to the needs of its students. Today on many CUNY campuses students, faculty and administrators are responding to the needs of incoming fre hmen with a variety of instructional and counseling patterns. Which of these will prove effective is a matter of formative - not summative - evaluation.

Open admissions has emerged from many beginnings. It is now <u>in medias res</u>. Let us pray it has no end.